



Schott's Vocab



A Miscellany of Modern Words & Phrases

March 26, 2010, 11:00 am

Weekend Competition Q&A: A Bissel Yiddish?

This weekend, in the run-up to Passover, co-vocabularists are invited to share their love of Yiddish and pose questions to an expert on the language.

Although spoken fluently by relatively few people, Yiddish has a tenacious place in contemporary culture. Certain words (*chutzpah*, *maven*, *kvetch*, *kosher*...) have entered mainstream English as much for the pleasure of their pronunciation as the deliciously precise meanings they convey.

Even non-Jews, to [quote](#) Franz Kafka, “understand far more Yiddish than [they] think.”

Ponder that the next time you *nosh* on your *lox*, or *schmooze* with a *mensh*.

Co-vocabularists' questions will be answered by [Michael Wex](#), author of the bestselling “[Born to Kvetch](#),” and, most recently, “[How to Be a Mentsh and Not a Shmuck](#).”

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[1.](#)

Technic Ally

Toronto

March 26th, 2010

8:48 am

Oy!

Do I have a Question?

What are your favourite five hundred words in Yiddish, each with an anecdote, if that's okay with you?

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[2.](#)

J. Toscano

Brooklyn, NY

March 26th, 2010

9:05 am

Since I've been told I was a zaftig, meshuggener shiksa, with a neighbor that is such a kvetch and her husband is such a nudnik, I should be able to give a good spiel with extra shmaltz in Yiddish.

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[3.](#)

p.solanki

toronto,canada

March 26th, 2010

9:57 am

You call this a competition? Challenge, schmellenge. You got some chutzpah asking a fertummelt goy boy.

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[4.](#)

[Nowhere Man](#)

Nowhere, CA

March 26th, 2010

9:57 am

I'm always curious -- what is the male equivalent of the shiksa?

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5.

[Mark L.](#)

Milwaukee, WI

March 26th, 2010

10:00 am

Are Jews who speak only Yiddish because they think Hebrew is holy and English is for goyim just being a bunch of alterkockers?

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6.

Neil

Des Moines, IA

March 26th, 2010

10:29 am

To # 4: It's "shaygetz".

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7.

PC

NY

March 26th, 2010

10:30 am

Tell #4 that mistama he's a "shaygetz". This is but a schmear of mammeloshon, but how about all the English words that sound Yiddish: farflung, farfetched. Gevalt!

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8.

Evelyn Shaw

Scotch Plains, NJ

March 26th, 2010

10:30 am

Michael Wex is to be commended for spelling the word mentsh with a t. Even the NY Times spells it mensch (which is, of course, incorrect). The Yiddish word, has a "tet" in it, which is the sound of the letter t. Finally, someone who got it right!!! Question: Why is the t not included in the word mensch, that is, mentch/ mentsh?

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9.

pinkus mayer

South America

March 26th, 2010

10:31 am

In English we have a foot and a leg. ¿What are the equivalent words in yidish? Or "FIS" works for both?

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10.

Lorraine

Indianapolis

March 26th, 2010

10:32 am

I've schlepped all over this country and have never forgotten the putzes and schlamiels I've met along the way. One of my Jewish friends kvetched she'd never heard a goy use Yiddish so much. Must be because I'm meshuggener.

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11.

egld02155

Atlanta

March 26th, 2010

10:32 am

Shaygitz

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 7 Readers

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12.

Kilroy

Jersey City, NJ

March 26th, 2010

10:33 am

Nowhere Man:

Sheygets; pl, shkotsim. The parallel to shiksa isn't perfect, but nu, it's better than nothing.

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13.

Dreidl

Chicago

March 26th, 2010

10:34 am

The male equivalent of a shiksa is a sheygetz.

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14.

M. Forland

San Antonio

March 26th, 2010

10:34 am

The male equivalent of a shiksa is a shagitz.

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15.

OR

NY, NY

March 26th, 2010

10:34 am

The original source for the word kosher is hebrew. In fact, this applies to the words maven and chutzpah as

well. While these words are part of the yiddish lexicon, it would be unfortunate to remember where they actually come from.

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16.

Carol Shelton

Pittsburgh

March 26th, 2010

10:35 am

Are members of the Jewish community flattered, pleased, annoyed, or offended by outsiders' failed attempts at using Yiddish words?

I first heard my first few Yiddish words in my mid-twenties but didn't have the confidence to use any until at least a decade later.

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17.

[Andrea Grenadier](#)

Alexandria, VA

March 26th, 2010

10:35 am

A male version of "shiksa" is a sheygets! (Someone my dad preferred I *not* date when younger. Oy vey iz mir.

Mark, in my family, Hebrew was for shul, and Yiddish was for fun!

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18.

[Gary Patton](#)

New Hampshire

March 26th, 2010

10:35 am

The male equivalent of a shiksa is a shaygitz.

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19.

[Donald W. Dickson](#)

Austin, Texas

March 26th, 2010

10:36 am

Yes, I have questions.

(1) Even after consulting Wikipedia I'm not sure I understand the difference, if any, between Yiddish and Hebrew.

(2) What is the proper spelling and definition of "verklemt?"

(3) Prompted by my experience years ago with a Jewish-owned moving company in New York City which employed a lot of young non-English-speaking Israeli emigres: Is it common for English obscenities to be

incorporated in Yiddish conversation? (Certainly it seemed so, especially when my sleep sofa had to go up three flights of narrow stairs.)

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20.

mark

new hampshire

March 26th, 2010

10:39 am

Answer to number 4 is shaygets

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21.

nijacobs

New York

March 26th, 2010

10:39 am

The male equivalent of a shiksa is a shaygetz.

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22.

Lisa

Texas

March 26th, 2010

10:45 am

My grandparents, who were from Lvov, Poland, always pronounced Yiddish words slightly differently than the transliterations I usually see in English. For example -- they would say "mishshigenah" (pardon my transliteration) rather than "meshuggener" and "pipik" rather than "pupik." Is this just a quirk of my grandparents ... or a regional twist/ accent? I am wondering if their Yiddish was more Polish than German.

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23.

[Sorka](#)

Georgia

March 26th, 2010

11:07 am

My father, who can understand conversational Yiddish somewhat well as his grandmother primarily spoke Yiddish, uses the word "nuchschlepper" often, or someone who is basically a loser, a lightweight (I think). Is this word Yiddish, Yinglish, or made up altogether? I use a lot of Yiddish words and learned a few choice ones from reading Leo Rosten's books. Shpilkes is my favorite!

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24.

DRKS

St. Paul, MN

March 26th, 2010

11:08 am

to #8: My guess is that folks are using the spelling of the German word "Mensch" (human being).

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25.

karen lyons kalmenson

great neck, ny

March 26th, 2010

11:08 am

a shiksa, a shaygetz a goy or a jew, does this whole thing sound kosher to you?

for passover i am travelling to mexico to matzoh pichu

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About Schott's Vocab



Schott's Vocab is a repository of unconsidered lexicographical trifles — some serious, others frivolous, some neologized, others newly newsworthy. Each day, Schott's Vocab explores news sites around the world to find words and phrases that encapsulate the times in which we live or shed light on a story of note. If language is the archives of history, as Emerson believed, then Schott's Vocab is an attempt to index those archives on the fly.

Ben Schott is the author of “Schott's Original Miscellany,” its two sequels, and the yearbook “Schott's Almanac.” He is a contributing columnist to The Times's Op-Ed page. He lives in London and New York.

His Web site can be viewed at benschott.com, and his Opinion pieces [here](#).

Participate

Vocabulary loves company. So, if you have stumbled across a word or phrase that you think suitable for inclusion, please e-mail your suggestion to ben.schott@nytimes.com. You can also follow Schott's Vocab on [Twitter](#).

Vocab of Note

- [Bush Legs](#)

Russian nickname for American chicken products.

- [Koodie](#)

A kid who is a foodie.

- [Pacman Notes](#)

A nickname for Payment in Kind (P.I.K.) notes – a mechanism of commercial money lending popular during the “credit binge” of the mid-2000s.

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